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ROMANS 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Jews and the Law (2:17-3:8)	God's Judgment Defended	The Advantage of the Jews	The Jews and the Law (2:17-3:8)	God's Promises Will Not Save Them
3:1-8	3:1-8 (4)	3:1-8 (4)	3:1-4 (4)	3:1-8 (4)
			3:5-6	
			3:7-8	
There is None Righteous	All Have Sinned	All are Guilty	No Man is Righteous	All are Guilty
3:9-20 (10-18)	3:9-20 (10-18)	3:9-18 (10-18)	3:9-18 (10-18)	3:9-18 (10-18)
		3:19-20	3:19-20	3:19-20
Righteousness Through Faith	God's Righteousness Through Faith	The True Righteousness	How God Put Men Right	The Revelation of God's Judgment
3:21-26	3:21-26	3:21-26	3:21-26	3:21-26
	Boasting Excluded	Boasting is Excluded		What Faith Does
3:27-31	3:27-31	3:27-31	3:27-31	3:27-31

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. Verses 1-8 are a related content, but it is difficult to follow Paul's logic because he is using a literary technique called diatribe (a supposed objector).

B. It seems that Paul is anticipating how some Jewish people will respond to Rom. 2:17-29, so he answers their objections (Corley, Vaughan, *Romans*, pp. 37-39).
   1. First question. Are there really no advantages for the Jews? (Rom. 3:1-2)
   2. Second question. Has God's word failed because some Jews were unfaithful? (Rom. 3:3-4)
   3. Third question. If God used the Jews to reveal His character are the Jews still judicially responsible? (Rom. 3:5-8)

C. The conclusion goes back to Rom. 2:11. There is no favoritism with God. All humans are accountable for living apart from the light they have (natural revelation and/or special revelation).

D. Romans 3:9-18 contains a series of OT quotes which declare the sins of the Jews and the Gentiles, see notes online.

E. Romans 3:19-20 sums up the spiritual condition of Israel and the purpose of the OT (cf. Galatians 3; book of Hebrews).

F. Romans 3:21-31 is the summary of Rom. 1:18-3:20. They are the first theological point of the gospel.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:1-8

[1]Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? [2]Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. [3]What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? [4]May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." [5]But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) [6]May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? [7]But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? [8]And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

3:1 "what advantage has the Jew" Paul is continuing to use the literary technique of diatribe, or a supposed objector, to communicate his message. For a listing of the privileges of the Jewish people, see Rom. 3:2 and especially in 9:4-5. Paul develops this paragraph in Romans 9-11.

SPECIAL TOPIC: JEWS

3:2 "First of all" Paul uses "first" in Rom. 1:8, but without a second item being mentioned. He does the same here. Paul's writing was so intense, as well as being dictated, that often his grammatical constructions are incomplete.

▣ **"they were entrusted with the oracles of God"** Having God's revelation is an awesome responsibility as well as a tremendous privilege (cf. Rom. 9:4-5). They were stewards of God's gift (AORIST PASSIVE, cf. 1 Thess. 2:4).

The word *logion* (oracles) is used in the Septuagint for the word from God (cf. Num. 24:4,16; Deut. 33:9; Ps. 107:11; 119:67; Isa. 5:24; 28:13), which would denote the OT. It is consistently used in this same sense in the NT (cf. Acts 7:38; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11).

3:3 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. Verses 5 and 7 are also FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES.

The grammar of Rom. 3:3 expects a "no" answer.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

▣

NASB, NKJV, Peshitta	**"some did not believe"**
NRSV, NJB	**"some were unfaithful"**
TEV, REB	**"what if some of them were unfaithful"**

This may refer either to individual Israelite's

1. lifestyle unfaithfulness
2. lack of personal faith in YHWH

It is difficult to relate intellectually to the unconditional promises of God (i.e., redemption of a fallen mankind) and the conditional mandate of human response. Yet this is a biblical paradox (cf. Rom. 3:4-5). God is faithful even when His people are not (cf. Hosea 1; 3; 2 Tim. 2:13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE IN THE NT

SPECIAL TOPIC: EASTERN LITERATURE

▣ **"nullify"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: NULL AND VOID (*KATARGEŌ*)

▣ **"the faithfulness of God"** This truth (cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18) is foundational to humans' trust in God's (cf. Deut. 7:9; Isa. 49:7).

1. unchanging character (see SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL'S GOD (OT)
2. eternal promises (SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTIC OF ISRAEL'S GOD (NT)

He has revealed Himself in creation, revelation, covenant, and Messiah! Even amidst human unfaithfulness He remains faithful (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13)!

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE, TRUST, FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS IN THE OT

3:4

NASB	**"May it never be!"**
NKJV, TEV, REB	**"Certainly not!"**
NRSV	**"By no means!"**
NJB	**"That would be absurd"**
Peshitta	**"Far be it!"**

This is a rare use of the OPTATIVE MOOD which expressed a wish or a prayer and this phrase should be translated, "May it never be." It may reflect a Hebrew idiom. This phrase of "astonished unbelief" was often used by Paul because of his literary technique of diatribe (cf. Rom. 3:4,6,31;

6:2,15; 7:7,13; 9:14; 11:1; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). It was his way of emphatically denying a supposed assertion.

Notice the literary ways Paul rejects the supposed objector questions and statements.

1. "May it never be," Rom. 3:4,6
2. "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar," Rom. 3:4
3. "(I am speaking in human terms)," Rom. 3:5
4. "(as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say)," Rom. 3:8

▣ **"let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar"** This is a PRESENT MIDDLE IMPERATIVE. This construction focuses on the continuing state of the subject; God is faithful and truthful, humans are unfaithful and liars! This is an allusion to Ps. 116:11 and is similar to what Job had to learn in Job 32:2; 40:8.

Notice the universal element of sinfulness in this chapter, represented by Paul's use of *pas* (all, every) in Rom. 3:4,9,12,19,20,23,24, but praise God, also the universal offer of salvation to all (cf. Rom. 3:22).

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

▣ **"as it is written"** Literally "it has been and continues to be written." This is a PERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE. It became a technical idiom used to assert God's inspiration of the Scriptures (cf. Matt. 5:17-19). It introduces a quote from Ps. 51:4 from the Septuagint (LXX).

3:5-6 The argument Paul is making in these verses relates to God's special choice of Israel as His means of reaching the world (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6; see SPECIAL TOPIC: HE CHOSE US). In the OT "election" referred to service, not special privilege. God made a covenant with them. He was faithful; they were unfaithful (cf. Nehemiah 9). The fact that God judged unfaithful Israelites is evidence of His righteousness.

Israel was meant to be a means of reaching the Gentiles. They failed! God's purpose of the universal offering of salvation (cf. Gen. 3:15) is not affected by the failure of Israel. As a matter of fact, God's faithfulness to His original covenant is confirmed in Romans 9-11. Unbelieving Israel is rejected, but a believing Israel will culminate God's plan of redemption.

Paul's diatribe in Rom. 3:5-6 is paralleled in Rom. 3:7-8.

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHY DO OT COVENANT PROMISES SEEM SO DIFFERENT FROM NT COVENANT PROMISES?

3:5 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. Verses 3 and 7 are also FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

▣ **"If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God"** This PRONOUN, "our," must refer in a collective sense to all Jews.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

▣ **"what shall we say"** Paul is still using diatribe (cf. Rom. 3:5; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,39). Paul is clarifying his presentation by the use of a supposed objector (cf. Mal. 1:2,6,7,12,13; 2:14,17 [twice]; 3:7,13,14).

▣

NASB	**"(I am speaking in human terms)"**
NKJV	**"(I speak as a man)"**

NRSV	**"(I speak in a human way)"**
TEV	**"(I speak here as men do"**
NJB	**"—to use a human analogy—"**
REB	**"(I speak of him in human terms)"**
Peshitta	**"I speak as a man"**

Paul often used human logic in his theological arguments (cf. Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 3:15). Here it functions as a way of rejecting the assertions of the supposed objector.

SPECIAL TOPIC: JUDGMENT IN THE NT

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S USE OF *KOSMOS*

3:7-8 There is an obvious parallel between Rom. 3:5 and 7 (both begin with *ei de*). Paul is either

1. continuing to use the literary technique of diatribe, a supposed objector (cf. Rom. 3:5,7; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30)
2. reacting to criticism of his justification by grace through faith preaching (cf. Rom. 3:8)

Paul did not explain or answer the charge in detail but forcefully condemns the accusation. It is possible that the objection to a free undeserved justification by faith was that it would lead to lawlessness or just more unfaithful disobedience. Paul believed that free grace would lead to Christlikeness through a new spirit and life of gratitude! The Jews, the Greek moralists, and Paul all wanted ethical living in their converts! But it comes, not through conformity to an external law code, but a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36).

SPECIAL TOPIC: NT EVIDENCE FOR ONE'S SALVATION

3:7 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE (also Rom. 3:3 and 5) which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes.

▣ **"the truth of God"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: "TRUTH" IN PAUL'S WRITINGS

▣ **"abounded"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: ABOUND

▣ **"His glory"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*DOXA*, NT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*KABOD*, OT)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:9-18

[9]What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; [10]as it is written,

"There is none righteous, not even one;

[11]There is none who understands,

There is none who seeks for God;

[12]All have turned aside, together they have become useless;

There is none who does good,

There is not even one."

[13]"Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,"

"The poison of asps is under their lips";

[14]"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness";

[15]"Their feet are swift to shed blood,

[16]DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
[17]AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."
[18]"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

3:9 "Are we better than they" The grammar at this point is ambiguous. It is obvious that the main truth of this passage is that all humanity is in need of God's grace (cf. Rom. 3:9,19,23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22). However, it is uncertain whether the specific reference was to Jews (Paul and his kinsmen, cf. TEV, RSV) or Christians (Paul and fellow believers apart from the grace of God). Jews did have some advantages (cf. Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5), but these advantages make them even more responsible (cf. Luke 12:48)! All humans are spiritually lost and in need of God's grace (v. 23).

The term "better" is understood by a minority of scholars as PASSIVE VOICE instead of MIDDLE ("better off"), resulting in the translation "excelled by" or "disadvantaged by."

Romans is often said to be the most locally neutral of Paul's letters. Most of Paul's letters address a local need or crises (occasional documents). However, the jealousy between believing Jewish leaders and believing Gentile leaders in the church at Rome may be in the background of Romans 1-3 and 9-11.

▣ **"for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin"** This VERB (AORIST MIDDLE [deponent] INDICATIVE) is found only here in the NT. Paul is referring to his sustained argument of Rom. 1:18-2:29. This is summarized in v. 23.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE FALL OF MANKIND

▣ **"under sin"** Paul personifies "sin" (*Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 300) as a cruel taskmaster over fallen humanity (cf. Rom. 6:16-23).

3:10-18 "as it is written" This phrase also occurs in Rom. 3:4. The following statements are a series of OT quotes using metaphors of the human body to emphasize the fallenness of mankind.

1. vv. 10-12, Eccl. 7:20 or Ps. 14:1-3
2. v. 13, Ps. 5:9 and 140:3
3. v. 14, Ps. 10:7
4. vv. 15-17, Isa. 59:7-8 and Pro. 1:16
5. v. 18, Ps. 36:1

It is surprising that Paul did not use Isa. 53:6.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:19-20

[19]Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; [20]because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

3:19 "we know that" See note at Rom. 2:2.

▣ **"the Law"** In this context it must refer to the whole OT (cf. Rom. 3:21) because of the non-Pentateuch passages quoted in Rom. 3:10-18. Paul personifies "the law" as he did "the sin" in v. 9 (cf. Rom. 6:16-23).

▣ **"to those who are under the Law"** This refers uniquely to Jews and Gentile converts. Although it must be said that several of the OT quotes used refer to Gentiles in their original contexts. All humans are sinful (cf. Gen. 6:5,12-13; 8:21; 1 Kgs. 8:46; 2 Chr. 6:36; Job 4:17; 9:2;

15:14-16; 25:4; Ps. 14:1,3; 51:5; 130:3; 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9,19,23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:2-3; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8-10)!

▣

NASB	**"that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God"**
NKJV, Pehsitta	**"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"**
NRSV	**"so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God"**
TEV	**"in order to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under God's judgment"**
NJB	**"but it is meant to silence everyone and to lay the whole world open to God's judgment"**
REB	**"so that no one may have anything to say in self-defense, and the whole world may be exposed to God's judgment"**

This is the major theme of Rom. 1:18-3:20 which is summarized in Rom. 3:23.

▣ **"every mouth"** There are several phrases in Rom. 3:19-20 which denote all humanity.

1. "every mouth," Rom. 3:19
2. "all the world," Rom. 3:19
3. "no flesh," Rom. 3:20

3:20 "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" This is an allusion to Ps. 143:2 (also note Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4; Ps. 130:3; Pro. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; 1 Kgs. 8:46; 2 Chr. 6:36), but with an added opening phrase. This was a major aspect of Paul's gospel (cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:11). As a committed Pharisee, Paul uniquely knew the inability of religious enthusiasm and meticulous performance to provide inner peace.

For "flesh" see SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

▣

NASB, NRSV	**"through the Law comes the knowledge of sin"**
NKJV	**"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"**
TEV	**"what the Law does is to make man know that he has sinned"**
NJB	**"all that law does is to tell us what is sinful"**
REB	**"law brings only the consciousness of sin"**
Peshitta	**"For by means of the law, sin is known"**

This was one of the purposes of the OT. It was never meant to bring salvation to fallen mankind. Its purpose was to reveal sinfulness and drive all humans to the mercy of YHWH (cf. Rom. 4:15; 5:13,20; 7:7; Gal. 3:19-22, 23-29).

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. How does the Jews' unfaithfulness affect God's promises? (3:3-4)
2. Is there any advantage with God in being Jewish? (3:1-8)
3. What is the point of the supposed objection (diatribe) in Rom. 3:5-8?
4. Does how one lives really count if justification is by grace through faith apart from works (cf. Rom. 3:8)?
5. Define the theological (Calvin) concept of total depravity (cf. Rom. 3:10-18).
6. What is the purpose of the Mosaic law, or law in general (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:24-25)?
7. Why is Satan not mentioned at all in Romans 1-3 which deal with mankind's lostness?

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO ROMANS 3:21-31

A. What is the literary purpose of Romans 3:21-31?
   1. the climactic summary of Rom. 1:18-3:20
   2. an amplification of Rom. 1:16-17 (the theme of the whole book)
   3. an introduction to Romans 4-8 (esp. Rom. 3:28)

B. This climactic summary of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith was characterized by the Reformers.
   1. Martin Luther as "the chief point and very central place of the epistle and the whole Bible"
   2. John Calvin as "there is not probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ"

C. This is the theological essence of evangelical Christianity. To understand this context is to understand Christianity. This is the gospel in a two-paragraph summary as John 3:16 is the gospel in a verse. This is the heart and soul of Paul's gospel presentation.
   The three key interpretive questions are:
   1. What does the term "law" mean?
   2. What does the phrase "the righteousness of God" mean?
   3. What do the terms "faith" and "believe" mean?

D. I thank God for the word "all" in Rom. 3:22 (cf. Rom. 3:29) and the word "gift" in Rom. 3:24 (cf. Rom. 5:15,17; 6:23).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:21-26

[21]But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [22]even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; [23]for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24]being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; [25]whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; [26]for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

3:21 "But now" Paul is contrasting the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, the old age of rebellion with the new age of righteousness. This would then parallel "at the present time" (cf. Rom. 3:26; "but now" of Rom. 6:22; 7:6).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THIS AGE AND THE AGE TO COME

▣ **"now apart from the Law"** It is often hard to be certain whether Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law (NASB) or law in general (NRSV, TEV, NJB, NIV) in these opening chapters. In this context the Jewish Law fits Paul's argument best. All humans have violated every set of moral, societal guidelines whether internal or external. Our problems as fallen mankind is that we want no guidelines at all except our own selfish, self-centered desires (cf. Genesis 3) which so characterizes modern western individualism.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

▣

NASB	**"*the* righteousness of God"**
NKJV, NRSV, REB, Peshitta	**"the righteousness of God"**
TEV	**"God's way of putting people right with himself"**
NJB	**"God's saving justice"**

There is no DEFINITE ARTICLE with "righteousness." This does not refer to God's character, but God's way of imparting forgiveness and acceptance to sinful people. This very phrase was used in the theological theme of Rom. 1:16-17. The clearly revealed mechanism is faith in the crucified Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 3:22,24-26).

The fact that this term "righteousness" (*dikaiosonē*) and its derivatives (see note at Rom. 2:13) are used so often in this context shows its significance (cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:5,21,22,25,26; 4:3,5,6,9,11,13,22; 5:17,21; 6:13,16,18,19,20; 8:10; 9:28,30,31; 10:3,4,5,6,10,17). This Greek term is from an OT construction metaphor (*tsadak*) of "a standard" or "a measuring reed." The standard is God Himself. This term reflects God's character which is freely given to fallen mankind through Christ (cf. Romans 4; 2 Cor. 5:21). Admitting their need and accepting God's gift was, and is, so humiliating to prideful, self-centered mankind-especially legalistic, religious mankind.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

▣ **"has been manifested"** This phrase is very similar to Rom. 1:17. However, the VERB TENSE is different. The VERB here can be translated, "has been and continues to be clearly revealed." It is a PERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE, while the synonym in Rom. 1:17 is PRESENT PASSIVE INDICATIVE. God has clearly revealed the gospel both in the OT (cf. Romans 4) and in Jesus (John 1; Colossians 1; Hebrews 1).

▣ **"being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets"** This referred to two of the three divisions of the Hebrew canon (Law, Prophets, and Writings). These first two were used to refer to the whole (see note at Rom. 3:19; Matt. 5:17). This clearly showed that the gospel was contained in preliminary form in the OT (cf. Luke 24:27,44; Acts 10:43). It was not an afterthought, "Plan B," or a last minute crash program (cf. Rom. 1:2).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HEBREW CANON

3:22 "through faith in Jesus Christ" This is literally "through faith of Jesus Christ." This is a GENITIVE construction. It is repeated in Gal. 2:16 and Phil. 3:9 as well as a similar form in Rom. 3:26; Gal. 2:16,20; 3:22. It could mean

1. the faith or faithfulness of Jesus (SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE)
2. Jesus as the object of our faith (OBJECTIVE GENITIVE)

The same grammatical construction in Gal. 2:16 makes #2 the best choice.

This shows the main aspect of God's justification. It is the righteousness of God made operative in one's life by

1. God's free gift through Christ (cf. Rom. 4:5; 6:23)
2. must be accepted by faith/belief/trust (cf. Eph. 2:8-9)
3. lived out in daily life (cf. Eph. 1:4; 2:10)

▣ **"for all"** The gospel is for all humans (cf. Rom. 3:24; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 18:23,32; John 3:16-17; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 3:4-5; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:1; 4:14). What a great truth! This must balance the biblical truth of election. God's election must not be understood in the Islamic sense of determinism nor in the ultra-Calvinistic sense of some vs. others, but in the covenantal sense. Old Testament election was for service, not privilege! God promised to redeem fallen mankind (cf. Gen. 3:15). God called and chose all mankind through Israel (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6). God elects through faith in Christ. God always takes the initiative in salvation (cf. John 6:44,65). Ephesians 1 and Romans 9 are the strongest biblical passages on the doctrine of predestination which was theologically emphasized by Augustine and Calvin.

God chose believers not only to salvation (justification), but also to sanctification (cf. Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:12). This could relate to

1. our position in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)
2. God's desire to reproduce His character in His children (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 2:10)

God's will for His children is both heaven one day and Christlikeness now!

The goal of predestination is holiness (cf. Eph. 1:4), not privilege! God's call was not to a selected few of Adam's children, but all! It was a call to God's own character (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13). To turn predestination into a theological tenant instead of a holy life is a tragedy of human theological systems. Often our theological grids distort biblical texts!

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

SPECIAL TOPIC: SANCTIFICATION

SPECIAL TOPIC: ELECTION/PREDESTINATION AND THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGICAL BALANCE

▣ **"who believe"** Jesus died for all humans. Potentially all can be saved. It is mankind's personal reception (PRESENT PARTICIPLE, see SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK VERB TERMS USED FOR SALVATION) that makes Jesus' righteousness applicable to their lives (cf. Rom. 1:16; John 1:12; 3:16; 20:31; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 John 5:13). The Bible presents two criteria for imputed righteousness: faith and repentance (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:31 and see note at Rom. 1:5). This text clearly reveals the universal offer of salvation but the tragedy and mystery is that not all will be saved.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE IN THE NT

▣ **"for there is no distinction"** There is only one way and one Person by which humans (Jews and Gentiles) can be saved (cf. John 10:1-2,7; 11:25; 14:6). Anyone and everyone can be saved by faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16; 4:11,16; 10:4,12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

3:23-26 This is one sentence in Greek.

3:23	
NASB, NKJV, NRSV, Peshitta	**"for all have sinned and fall short of"**
TEV	**"all men have sinned and are far away from"**
NJB	**"sinned and forfeited"**

REB "for all alike have sinned and are deprived of"

This is a summary of Rom. 1:18-3:20. Everyone needs to be saved by Christ (cf. Gen. 6:5,12-13; 8:21; 1 Kgs. 8:46; 2 Chr. 6:36; Job 4:17; 9:2; 15:14-16; 25:4; Ps. 14:1,3; 51:5; 130:3; 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9,19,23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:2-3; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8-10).

"Sinned" is an AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE, while "continues to come short" is a PRESENT MIDDLE INDICATIVE. Possibly this phrase referred to both

1. mankind's collective fall in Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12-21)
2. his continual individual acts of rebellion

None of the modern English translations specifically reflect this distinction.

This verse relates theologically to Rom. 3:21 and not directly to Rom. 3:24.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE FALL OF MANKIND

▣ **"the glory of God"** Humans were made in God's image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6), which was not true of any other created thing. Humans were to fellowship with the God of glory and reflect His character! Sin damaged the image, but God's grace through Christ's death and believers's faith has restored the image (cf. Col. 3:10).

In the OT the most common Hebrew word for "glory" (*kbd*) was originally a commercial term (which referred to a pair of scales) which meant "to be heavy."

SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*KABOD*, OT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*DOXA*, NT)

3:24 "being justified as a gift by His grace" This is a PRESENT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. This is where the gospel begins—the grace of God who gives righteousness (cf. Rom. 5:15-17; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9). The Greek term "justify" (*dikaioō*) was from the same root as "righteousness" (*dikaiosunē*, see SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS).

God always takes the initiative (cf. John 6:44,65). The question is, "Does God call all or just some?" Because of John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14, I believe He calls all! Genesis 3:15 is a promise to all humanity made in God's image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27).

The mystery is why some respond and some do not when they hear the gospel! In my opinion, to say that God calls some (i.e., the elect) and not others, based solely on His choice, with no merit on the the individual's part, turns God's choice into "arbitrary selection." This damages the character of God. I prefer to believe it is the "mystery of iniquity" (i.e., the Fall). The blame lies solely on humanity's damaged image. This is not a complete answer to the question, but it is the best of these two choices.

In verses 24-25 there are three metaphors used to describe salvation. Paul often pulled imagery from different areas of life to clearly illustrate his gospel.

1. "justified" which was a legal term that meant "no penalty given" or to pronounce one not guilty
2. "redemption" which was from the slave market that meant "bought back" or "to set free"
3. "propitiation" which was from the sacrificial system and meant the place of covering or atonement

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL'S GOD (OT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: ELECTION

▣ **"gift"** Paul uses this concept several times using two Greek word groups.

1. *dōrean*, ADVERB, "freely" (here)
2. *dōrea*, NOUN, "free gift" (see note at Rom. 5:15)

3. *dōron*, NOUN, "gift" (cf. Eph. 2:8)
4. *charisma*, NOUN, "free debt" or "free favor" (cf. Rom. 1:11; 5:15,16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6)
5. *charisomai*, VERB, "grant as a free favor" (cf. Rom. 8:32)
6. *charis*, NOUN, "free favor" or "free gift" (cf. Rom. 4:4,16; 11:5,6; Eph. 2:5,8)

Salvation is always a divine gift that must be received.

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "RECEIVE," "BELIEVE," "CONFESS/PROFESS," "CALL UPON"?

▣ **"through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus"** The mechanism for our salvation is Jesus' substitutionary death and resurrection. The biblical focus is not on how much was paid or to whom the price was paid (Augustine), but on the fact that mankind has been delivered from sin's guilt and punishment by means of an innocent substitute (cf. Isaiah 53; Mark 10:45; John 1:29,36; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19).

The verse also shows the costliness of Gen. 3:15. Jesus bore the curse (cf. Gal. 3:13) and died (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) as a substitute for fallen mankind. Salvation may be free, but it is surely not cheap.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

3:25

NASB	**"whom God displayed publicly"**
NKJV	**"whom God set forth"**
NRSV	**"whom God put forward"**
TEV	**"God offered"**
NJB	**"who was appointed by God"**
REB	**"For God designed him"**
Peshitta	**"whom God has foreordained"**

This is an AORIST MIDDLE INDICATIVE of *protithēmi* (in Rom. 1:13 and Eph. 1:9 it means "to purpose," as does the NOUN in Rom. 8:28), which meant that God Himself revealed His own heart and purpose by the death of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:9; Gal. 3:1). God's eternal redemptive plan (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; 13:29; 26:22) involved the sacrifice of Jesus (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53:6,10; Rev. 13:8). See note at Rom. 9:11.

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

▣ **"to demonstrate"** This Greek term *endeiknumai* (*endeixis*, cf. Rom. 3:25,26) is used several times in Romans (cf. Rom. 2:15; 9:17,23; LXX Exod. 9:16). Its basic meaning is to manifest or display. God wanted humanity to clearly understand His redemptive purpose, plan, and righteousness. This context is setting out a biblical worldview

1. about God's character
2. about Christ's work
3. about humanity's need
4. about redemption's purpose.

God wants us to understand! This context is crucial for a proper understanding of Christianity. Some of the words and phrases are ambiguous or can be understood in several ways, but the thrust of the whole is very clear and plain. This context is the theological north star for the gospel.

▣

NASB	**"as a propitiation in His blood"**
NKJV	**"to be a propitiation by His blood"**
NRSV	**"as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood"**

TEV	**"so that by his blood he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven"**
NJB	**"to sacrifice his life so as to win reconciliation"**
REB	**"a means of expiating sin by his death"**
Peshitta	**"to be a propitiation through faith in his blood"**

In the Greco-Roman world this word carried the concept of a restoration of fellowship with an estranged deity by means of a price being paid. However, it is not used in this sense in the Septuagint. It was used in the Septuagint and in Heb. 9:5 to translate "mercy seat" (cf. Exod. 25:21-22; Lev. 16:12-15), which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant located in the Holy of Holies, the place where atonement was procured on behalf of the nation on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16). Obviously Paul is using sacrificial imagery from Israel's sacrificial system (i.e., Leviticus 1-7). This imagery (i.e., propitiation, ransom, sacrifice) is understood only in connection with the OT oracles of God. Paul then must explain their relevance to all mankind. YHWH revealed Himself to Abraham/Israel to reveal Himself to all; all are in His image; all have rebelled; all can be saved through faith in Christ (Jewish Messiah).

This term must be dealt with in a way that does not lessen God's revulsion to sin, but affirms His positive redemptive attitude toward sinners. A good discussion is found in James Stewart's *A Man in Christ*, pp. 214-224. One way to accomplish this is to translate the term so that it reflects God's work in Christ; "a propitiatory sacrifice"; or "with propitiatory power."

"In His blood" is an Hebraic way of referring to the substitutionary sacrifice of the innocent lamb of God (cf. John 1:29). To fully understand this concept Leviticus1-7 is crucial as well as the Day of Atonement in Romans 16. Blood refers to a sinless life given on behalf of the guilty (cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12). One died for all (cf. Rom. 5:12-21)!

▣ **"through faith"** Here again is the mechanism (cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:22,25,26,27,28,30) for anyone's and everyone's personal benefit available in Jesus' substitutionary death.

This phrase is omitted in the ancient uncial manuscript A from the 5th century (also the Greek text used by Chrysostom) and a 12th century uncial MS (2127). It is included in all other ancient Greek manuscripts. Some have the DEFINITE ARTICLE (cf. MSS P^{40}, B, C^3, D^3) with "faith" and some do not (cf. MSS א, C^*, D^*, F, G), however, this does not affect the meaning. The UBS^3 rates its inclusion as B (almost certain).

SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST

SPECIAL TOPIC: TEXTUAL CRITICISM

▣ **"to demonstrate His righteousness"** God must be true to His character and His word (cf. Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). In the OT the soul that sins must die (cf. Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4,20; Rom. 6:23). God said He would not acquit the guilty (cf. Exod. 23:7; 34:7). God's love for fallen mankind is so great He was willing to become a man, fulfill the Law, and die in fallen humanity's place (cf. Isaiah 53; Rom. 5:12-21). God's love and justice meet in Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:26).

▣

NASB, NKJV, NRSV	**"He passed over the sins previously committed"**
TEV	**"in the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins"**
NJB	**"for the past, when sins went unpunished"**
REB	**"he had overlooked the sins of the past"**
Peshitta	**"the remission of our sins that are past"**

The term "passed over" is *paresis*, which is used only here in the NT and never in the Septuagint. The Greek fathers and Jerome took it in its Greek literary meaning of "the forgiveness of a debt" (cf. Moulton and Milligan, p. 493). However, *pariēmi*, the VERB from which it comes means "to let pass beside" or "to relax" (cf. Luke 11:42).

So the question is did God forgive sins in the past looking toward Christ's future work or did He simply overlook them knowing Christ's future death would deal with the sin problem? The result is the same. Human sin, past, present, and future, is dealt with by Christ's sacrifice.

This was a past act of God's grace looking forward to Christ's work (cf. Acts 17:30; Rom. 4:15; 5:13) as well as a present and future act (cf. Rom. 3:26). God did not and does not take sin lightly, but He does accept Jesus' sacrifice as a full and final remedy to human rebellion. It is no longer a barrier to intimate fellowship with Himself, which was the purpose of creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-27).

3:26 The term "righteousness" in Rom. 3:25 is etymologically related to the terms "just" and "justifier" of Rom. 3:26. God desires His character to be manifested in believers' lives through faith in Christ. Jesus becomes our righteousness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), but believers must also become conformed to His righteousness, His likeness (cf. Rom. 8:29; Matt. 5:48; Lev. 11:44; 19:2). God wants a people who reflect His character to a lost world, so that they may come to Him and be saved.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

▣

NASB, NKJV, NRSV	**"the one who has faith in Jesus"**
TEV	**"everyone who believes in Jesus"**
NJB	**"everyone who has faith in Jesus"**
REB	**"anyone who puts his faith in Jesus"**
NET	**"the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness"**
Peshitta	**"to him who is in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ"**

The Greek text has "the *one* of faith of Jesus." The difficulty comes in the multitude of GENITIVE usages (see G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, p. 99). Most of the English translations see it as a person's belief/faith/trust in Jesus. The NET Bible takes it as referring to Rom. 3:22, where the GENITIVE is also used. However, v. 22 has both a reference to

1. Jesus' faithfulness (OT connotation)
2. believers' faith (NT usage, see Special Topic below)

Salvation is a result of Jesus' faithfulness which must be received.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "RECEIVE," "BELIEVE," "CONFESS/PROFESS," "CALL UPON"?

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:27-30

[27]Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. [28]For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. [29]Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30]since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

3:27 "Where then is boasting" The presence of the ARTICLE with "boasting" may reflect the pride of the Jews (cf. Rom. 2:17,23). The gospel is humbling. Fallen mankind (Jews and Gentiles) cannot help themselves (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

Just a brief further note to clarify my previous statement. Although humans cannot merit God's love and forgiveness does not imply they have no part in their own salvation. Humans must

sense their sin/guilt and embrace God's offer in Christ. God deals with fallen humanity by means of "covenant." We must respond and continue to respond.

1. repentance (see SPECIAL TOPIC: REPENTANCE (OT))
2. faith (see SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST)
3. obedience (see SPECIAL TOPIC: KEEP)
4. perseverance (see SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSEVERANCE

We do have a crucial part in our relationship with God. We are responders! But we must respond! Free will is as crucial a biblical doctrine as is sovereignty. The Bible, being an eastern book, presents truth in tension-filled pairs.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOASTING

SPECIAL TOPIC: EASTERN LITERATURE

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "RECEIVE," "BELIEVE," "CONFESS/PROFESS," "CALL UPON"?

▣ **"It is excluded"** This term (*ek* [out] plus *kleiō* [shut]) is used only here and in Gal. 4:17. It literally means "to lock out."

▣ **"by a law of faith"** God's New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 (Ezek. 36:22-36) is not based on performance, but on trust/faith/belief (*pistis*) in His gracious character and promises (see SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL'S GOD (OT). Both the Old and New Covenants were meant to change fallen mankind into God's character (righteous, i.e., Lev. 11:44; 19:2; Matt. 5:48; Rom. 8:29).

3:28 "we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." This is a summary of Rom. 3:21-26 and a foreshadowing of Romans 4-8 (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5). Salvation is a free gift through faith in Christ's finished work (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:15,17; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9). However, maturity is a "cost everything" life of obedience, service, and worship (cf. Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12; and see note at Rom. 1:5).

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

3:29 God's purpose has always been to redeem all humans made in His image (Gen. 1:26,27; 5:1; 9:6). The redemptive promise of Gen. 3:15 is to all of Adam's children. He chose Abraham in order to choose the world (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:4-6; John 3:16). See note at Rom. 3:24.

This verse, like Rom. 3:9, may reflect tension in the Roman church between believing Jewish leadership, who may have left Rome following Nero's edict forbidding Jewish worship which resulted in believing Gentile leadership, who replaced them. Romans 9-11 may also address this same tension.

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

3:30	
NASB	**"since indeed God is one"**
NKJV	**"since there is one God"**
NRSV	**"since God is one"**
TEV	**"God is one"**
NJB	**"since there is only one God"**
REB	**"For if the Lord is indeed one"**
Peshitta	**"For it is one God"**

This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. If monotheism is true, then He must be the God of all people!

SPECIAL TOPIC: MONOTHEISM

▣ **"He will justify the circumcised by faith"** The Greek word "justify" is from the same root as "righteousness." There is only one way to be right with God (cf. Rom. 9:30-32). The two criteria for salvation are faith and repentance (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21; see note at Rom. 1:5). This is true for both Jews and Greeks.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

▣ **"by faith. . .through faith"** There is obvious parallelism between these two clauses. The PREPOSITIONS *ek* and *dia* are used here synonymously. No distinction is intended.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIVE, OR TRUST

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 3:31

[31]Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

3:31

NASB, Peshitta	**"Do we then nullify the Law through faith"**
NKJV	**"Do we then make void the law through faith"**
NRSV	**"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith"**
TEV	**"Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law"**
NJB	**"Do we mean that faith makes the Law pointless"**
REB	**"Does this mean that we are using faith to undermine the law"**

The NT presents the OT in two different ways.

1. it is inspired, God-given revelation that will never pass away (cf. Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 7:12,14,16)
2. it is worn out and has passed away (cf. Heb. 8:13)

Paul used the term "nullify" at least twenty-five times. It is translated "make null and void," "render powerless," and "to make of no effect." For Paul the Law was a custodian (cf. Gal. 3:23) and tutor (cf. Gal. 3:24), but could not give eternal life (cf. Gal. 2:16,19; 3:19). It is the grounds of mankind's condemnation (cf. Gal. 3:13; Col. 2:14). The Mosaic Law functioned both as revelation and a moral test as did the "Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil."

There is uncertainty as to what Paul meant by "the Law."

1. a system of righteous works of Judaism
2. a stage for Gentile believers to pass through to salvation in Christ (Judaizers in Galatians)
3. a standard by which all humans fall short (cf. Rom. 1:18-3:20,23; 7:7-25; Gal. 3:1-29)

SPECIAL TOPIC: NULL AND VOID

▣ **"we establish the Law"** In light of the previous phrase, what does this phrase mean? It could indicate that

1. the Law was not a way of salvation but it is a continuing moral guide
2. it testified to the doctrine of "justification by grace through faith," Rom. 3:21; 4:3 (Gen. 15:6; Ps. 32:1-2,10-11)

3. the Law's weakness (human rebellion, cf. Rom. 7; Gal. 3) was fully satisfied by Christ's death, Rom. 8:3-4
4. the purpose of revelation is to restore the image of God in fallen humanity

The Law, after forensic righteousness, becomes a guide to true righteousness or Christlikeness.

The shocking paradox is that the Law failed (cf. Galatians 3; Hebrews) to establish God's righteousness, but through its nullification, by means of God's gift of grace through faith, the Christian lives a righteous, godly life. The goal of the Law has been met, not by human performance, but by the free gift of the grace of God in Christ! For "establish" see SPECIAL TOPIC: STAND

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Outline Romans 3:21-31 in your own words.
2. Why did God pass over man's sins in times past (Rom. 3:25)?
3. How was the OT believer saved from sin (3:25)?
4. How does faith in Jesus confirm the Law (3:31)?

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